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ABSTRACT

For Australia's tourism industry to be commercially effective, all of its workers must develop second language skills, intercultural skills, and support and tolerance of foreign guests. Community attitudes, education, the tourism industry itself, and research and development must change to foster cultural understanding and intercultural sensitivity in the Australian community as a whole. Children should be given second language training routinely, and proficiency should be required for both higher education and vocational training. A greater variety of courses must be made available, with practical proficiency their goal. Experts in applied linguistics should compile innovative course designs and not simply draw on existing course offerings that may not foster practical skills. Courses of differing lengths and intensities should be developed for both general and specific tourism purposes, with continuing education also made available. Improved testing procedures are needed, and courses integrating tourism with language and cultural study are recommended. Underused existing language resources should be tapped. The tourism industry itself should provide language learning incentives for its workers and publicly identify language-skilled personnel and related services. Research priorities include the study of projected tourism patterns, language skill need analysis, curriculum and materials development, and effective instructional methods. (MSE)

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PENETRATING THE LANGUAGE FRONTIER IN TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

Penetrating the Language Frontier in Tourism

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This paper discusses the place of language skills in promoting tourism and the implications for language teaching. The paper discusses the need for highly efficient and cost-effective courses in a variety of modes in a variety of educational settings. It considers the implications for course design, methodology, and assessment and for the language teaching that traditionally goes on in educational institutions. The need to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of courses and to make them available in various modes has implications for precise specification of needs and the use of appropriate assessment procedures emphasizing practical skills. The desirability of incentives for workers in the tourism industry to develop language skills has implications for recruitment, salary loadings, and assessment. If language skills are to be developed to meet the needs of the tourist industry, it is vital that thorough professional competence be expected of those involved in course design and evaluation; the use of well-intentioned amateurs without applied linguistic skills will bring inevitable failure as will any attempt simply to draw on traditional university departments offering language programmes notoriously ineffective in developing relevant practical skills. The paper also considers the research needs especially in such areas as the relationship between course design, time and proficiency attainments; needs analysis; maximizing effectiveness; the possibility of full-time residential courses up to 100 hours per week; and the measurement of aptitude and proficiency.

Penetrating the Language Frontier in Tourism

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INTRODUCTION: For more than fifteen years, in individual papers, formal submissions, conference discussions, press releases, letters to newspapers, and through personal representations, the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA) and many of its senior officers and member Associations have been pointing out the essential role of language teaching in economic development and, in particular, in promoting trade and tourism. We have pointed out the vital necessity of skills in the languages of our potential customers for "front-line" workers (including salespersons, promotions personnel, and trade negotiators) and also for designers and managerial persons making decisions about foreign markets. We have pointed out the implications for our profession: improved language skills for teachers, more practical goals, better methods, the need for all students to develop facility in at least one of a greater diversity of languages, and, not least, more functionally oriented and "communicative" syllabuses. For much of this time, our views have been disregarded, if not derided. However, in 1986, the first signs of success appeared when, following another series of press releases, letters to the editors of major newspapers, and extended discussion at the 1986 Biennial National Languages Conference, government statements, press comments, and the National Policy on Languages [Lo Bianco 1987: 48-55] started to echo the AFMLTA's statements on the economic significance of language skills and on the damage done to Australia's economic, especially export, development as a direct result of the devaluing of language skills and of the depressed state of the language teaching system. It was, then, with particular pleasure that we noted the theme of this conference and had this paper accepted. The time available will, however, mean, especially since someone other than the author will be presenting the paper, that it will be possible only to touch on the key issues without providing detailed discussion.

NEEDS AND PREMISES: There are four basic premises underlying this paper. First, if the tourist industry is to be commercially effective (i.e., if it is to persuade persons in other countries to hand their money to Australians in return for visiting our country), it must meet the needs of the potential customers. Hence, those people in the Australian industry who plan the products to be sold and those who promote them must understand what the customers want or need and what will persuade them to come: to do this, they must understand their culture. Second, tourists come to Australia to see Australia and experience Australian culture. It is neither necessary nor desirable that we change what the tourists are to experience in order to match their culture (they can stay at home more cheaply to experience their own culture) but they do need to be helped to understand and enjoy the foreign Australian culture, landscape, and people and to feel sufficiently secure that the new experiences are rewarding and

not confusing, alienating or frightening. Hence, the Australian tourist industry must see its role as partly providing bridges for the foreign tourist into Australian culture, always ensuring a sense of security, ready access to information and to solutions to the problems that tourists encounter, and maximum effective use of the time available. Third, most tourists coming to a new country and experiencing a new language and culture are insecure and disoriented and, if they are to enjoy their experience and be willing to recommend a visit to others and to return themselves, they must feel welcome, be assisted to excess rather than be left to get lost, confused and depressed. Fourth, the corollary of the first three premises is that information and assistance must be readily available in the language of the tourist. Hence, tourist literature, public notices, guide commentaries and the other oral and written language tourists utilize must be available both in English and in the languages of the major tourist groups. Where this is not immediately practicable and for languages that are less numerous amongst tourists to Australia, translations should be available at least in ready-reference indexes and documentation and commentary should be in 'simple English'. In addition, and of particular importance, personnel in contact with tourists must have skills in their languages, have ready access to interpreters where those skills are not available, and, perhaps most of all, demonstrate openmindedness towards and acceptance of, other cultures. In brief, all components of the tourist industry must adopt the attitude that Australia has unique Australian experiences to offer, that English as the nation's dominant language and as the leading international language, is a bonus to our industry but is not sacrosanct and the monolingualism assumed too long to be "normal" in Australia is both abnormal and defective: it is reasonable therefore to assume that, if we expect foreign tourists to give their savings to us, we should accommodate them to the extent of using their language and trying to accommodate their needs and expectations. Most of all, in the tourist industry, we are selling, not lumps of coal or bags of wool, but attitudes, interests and pleasant emotional responses. The key to these is communication, tourism is essentially an inter-personal industry, and the words of the American Congressman Paul Simon are worth recalling:

> You sell when you communicate... [In business,] I bought in some cases because of price, in some cases because of the quality of the product, but generally I bought on the basis of the salesperson, because that person communicated effectively with me ...
>
> ...You can buy in any language: you can't sell in any language...
> [Simon 1980: 2-3]

The implications of these basic premises apply throughout the tourist industry and not just to front-line contact persons though the implications differ slightly in force and direction according to the person's role; the conclusion to be drawn is that all workers in the industry (from salespersonnel to immigration and customs officials, from airline staff to shop assistants, receptionists and guides, or from chambermaids to managers) require courses in the language and culture of the tourist groups. For all persons, favourable intercultural and interracial attitudes are essential and there is strong evidence that the most effective way of developing such attitudes is through well-designed

language courses involving the development of practical skills and balanced cultural understanding; these provide the essential experience of stepping into another culture, of meeting persons of the other language and culture on equal terms, and of having to cope in communication situations with limited language skills [see Ingram 1979]. In other words, all workers in the tourist industry (all Australians, for that matter) require the mind-broadening experience of learning another language, they must learn to accept and communicate with people of other cultures, they must learn the skill of communicating if necessary with limited language resources, and they must learn to be tolerant and supportive of visitors who have to do this. For some workers, it is also essential that they develop practical skills in other languages as basic tools of trade in their day-to-day activities; the implications for the courses required will be considered subsequently.

IMPLICATIONS: If these arguments concerning the need for language skills and appropriate attitudes in the tourist industry (indeed in all export industries) are accepted, then there are implications in at least the following directions: community attitudes, education, the tourist industry itself, and research and development.

Community Attitudes: Community attitudes must be such that large numbers of culturally, linguistically and racially diverse tourists are accepted and encounter friendly, accepting and helpful attitudes amongst the Australians they contact; cultural understanding and intercultural sensitivity should be such that the chances of unwitting affronts to visitors by Australians are minimized. This need goes beyond personnel involved in tourism, in fact, and its importance for all Australians is increased by Australia's large immigration programme and its ethnically diverse society. Large-scale public awareness programmes are desirable to help in educating people in the directions just indicated, and, not least, perhaps, in counterbalancing the often negative debate on immigration that sometimes surfaces with xenophobic overtones. In addition, since the formal and informal education systems are society's main instruments by which to influence attitudinal changes, the education system must provide to all persons the sort of intercultural experiences through language learning that are most effective in achieving these goals [see Ingram 1979]. This approach has the additional benefit of creating in Australia much larger pools of people able to communicate at some level with non- or minimally English-speaking visitors.

Education: Since the implications of what precedes apply to all industry though with particular force to tourism and considering the arguments presented elsewhere for universal language learning in schools, there is a strong case for all children to be required to develop practically useful levels of proficiency in English and at least one other language and to have language study made both a pre-requisite to and an integral part of higher education and vocational training [see Ingram 1986 and AFMLTA 1982 where the case is elaborated]. This would greatly boost the number of trained people with skills in other languages, diversify the pool of such skills, and enable a readier and more flexible response to changing patterns of trade and tourism. If this is to be achieved, there are far-reaching implications for education in general and for language education in particular. These have been elaborated by the present writer in many

places but include compulsory language study, inclusion of language proficiency levels in tertiary entrance requirements, sufficient time allocation in the curriculum to enable practically useful proficiency levels to be attained, improved supply of more teachers with specialist language teacher training and higher proficiency levels in more languages, a greater variety of course types available in formal, informal and continuing education, and recognition that language learning can and does occur in many places beyond regular school classrooms and that the critical issue for school certification is attainment of minimum specified proficiency levels and not merely jumping through school hoops [see Ingram 1986, AFMLTA 1982, AFMLTA 1987 for more elaborated lists].

Not least, there are profound implications for course design. First, a much greater variety of courses must be available both in the school system and beyond and all courses must see as their principal goal (indeed, the goal on which depend all other potential goals for language teaching) the development of practical proficiency to a level commensurate with the learners', society's, and industries' needs but not less than Minimum Social Proficiency (i.e. S:2, L:2, W:2, R:2 on the ASLPR) [cf. AFMLTA 1987: A3]. Persons learning another language should also be encouraged to experience the language and culture at first hand either by taking advantage of the local ethnic community or by a period of residence in the country of origin of the language. It must also be accepted that the sheer diversity of languages and the changing language demands as tourist intake areas and other markets change mean that language learning facilities must exist beyond the formal education system, continuing education facilities must be designed to cater for vocational needs for language skills, and industry must accept responsibility to require employees to have or get necessary skills and, in some cases, to offer appropriate courses as an integral part of their staff training programmes. In addition, schools, tertiary institutions, and TAFE Colleges must accept that languages are vocationally relevant and that the quality of language learning courses is not reduced, indeed may be enhanced, by including components that are vocationally relevant. Acceptance of this would lead to many innovations that have been well-established in language programmes in other countries for many years, e.g., at one end of the education hierarchy, the possibility of joint degrees matching extended language study with other academic and vocational training and, at the other end, inclusion of tourism-related units in, say, a Primary or Secondary School Japanese course.

Second, the techniques are now available in applied linguistics to identify quite precisely the needs that workers and learners have and to plan courses to meet those needs at the same time as they develop the learners' general, practical proficiency in the language [e.g. see Ingram 1984]. Needs-based courses designed as indicated below not only meet the learners' and industries' needs most efficiently and cost-effectively but, because they do so, in testing terms they have higher face validity and are more motivating. This approach to course design is more rigorous than those that traditionally occurred in language teaching (especially in traditional university language departments) but it must be insisted that courses for industry (indeed all courses) are designed and evaluated by experts with appropriate applied linguistics skills. The deplorable tendency in Australia to believe that anyone able to speak the language or to read its

literature or anyone who happens to work in a particular industry is capable of designing an effective language course is no more defensible than the view that anyone with a body can plan a medical course or, to be more closely analogous, to re-create a living human being. In this context, the present writer has commented elsewhere [Ingram 1988] on the inadequacies of the first Japanese course designed for the tourist industry, sponsored by the Asian Studies Council and the Australian Tourism Industry Association (ATIA), and first taught in 1987. Such amateurism and apparent ignorance of the best modern principles of course design and, especially, of evaluation as were demonstrated in that exercise, if repeated, will inevitably lead to failure of the courses (especially after the initial Hawthorne effect of innovation has passed) and, even more seriously for the profession, will place the whole issue of language learning and its economic relevance in jeopardy. If language teaching is to be effective, if courses offered are to meet the learners' and industries' needs efficiently, and if new courses are to be adequately evaluated and improved, then the expertise now available through applied linguistics must be utilized to the full; decision-makers (whether politicians, industry representatives or employers) must be prepared to draw on expert advice from the relevant discipline of applied linguistics and not delude themselves into believing that their managers or people fluent in the language with no applied linguistic training are capable of designing, teaching or evaluating effective programmes.

Third, reference has already been made to the need for a greater variety of language courses, offered in a greater variety of modes, and designed to meet the needs of the tourist and other industries. In addition, industry, the unions and the language teaching profession need to be more adventurous in planning courses of different lengths and intensities. For instance, partly because of the heavy memory load language learning entails, there is evidence that the more intensive a course, the higher the proficiency levels attained. Hence, where urgent needs have to be met or where, for whatever reasons, course participants desire to reach high proficiency levels in a short time, intensive residential courses allowing total immersion in the language and culture in courses of up to 80 or 100 hours per week might be considered (though research is needed on the best way to structure such courses and, not least, on how to select suitable participants).

Fourth, within the context of tourism, there will be need for a variety of courses that fall into two broad categories:

1. Courses are required, mainly within the proficiency range of ASLPR 0 to 3, that aim to develop the learners' general proficiency but utilize situations related to tourism. How selective those situations (and, hence, the language functions and forms required to carry out the language tasks that occur in them) will be will depend on the variety of vocational areas from within tourism the learners in any class come from. In addition to practising the language tasks and functions engaged in by workers in the course of their duties, such courses should aim to enable learners to engage in general social interaction of the type that might occur in the minor everyday social encounters workers have with tourists.

2. There is also need for special purposes courses, preferably aimed at persons with some proficiency (desirably above ASLPR S:2, L:2, W:2, R:2), and intended to develop special purpose proficiency in the register or registers pertinent to the learner's vocational activity, e.g., courses for scuba diving instructors, quarantine officers, airline senior stewards, airline booking clerks, motel receptionists, tour guides, and so on.

The general principles of course design apply to both categories of courses and require that, taking account of the nature of the learners, their entry levels and goals, one identify the settings, situations, and roles in which the language will be used, and thence the tasks, functions, syntax, vocabulary, discourse and cohesive features, and cultural knowledge required to operate in those situations. The degree of specificity to the learners' own work situations will depend on their entry proficiency, the variety of the vocational fields they represent, and the goals of the course.

Fifth, no matter what courses are available especially where they are taken by persons already in employment, they will necessarily be of finite length leaving most learners with less proficiency than they desire or, possibly, need. Facilities are required (including distance learning courses, self-directed courses, and self-access learning facilities) to enable people who have exited from courses to continue to develop their language through formal study that supplements their on-going experience. In addition, all courses should encompass as one of their essential goals the development of the learners' independence and their ability to self-direct. A national institute of languages such as the AFMLTA has been advocating for the last decade could play a major part in this by developing courses needed by the tourist and other industries and offering distance learning and autonomous learning support programmes [see AFMLTA 1978, 1987, Ingram 1988a].

Sixth, there is need for greatly increased expertise in language testing with more persons available with skills in proficiency assessment that would enable them both to make valid and reliable assessments of the proficiency of second language speakers and to advise industry on the proficiency levels and special purpose skills needed to carry out tasks required by industry. To meet this need, the present writer and the AFMLTA have been advocating the provision of specialist courses in language testing and the setting-up of a system of accredited language testers analogous to that for translators and interpreters under NAATI [see Ingram 1986, 1987, 1988, AFMLTA 1982]. The Institute of Applied Linguistics in Brisbane C.A.E. (BCAE) offers such a course annually. In addition, all courses must, as already observed, see the development of practical skills as an essential goal pre-requisite to any other. Accordingly, all courses should include in their assessment procedures the assessment of the learners' practical proficiency and course evaluation must include consideration of proficiency levels attained and their relationship to the needs that resulted in the course.

Seventh, the rapidly growing English language teaching industry offers a complementary approach to penetrating the language frontier in tourism. Some institutions (including the Institute of Applied Linguistics in Brisbane C.A.E.) offer combined English and tourism courses. These take a variety of forms including vacation courses for overseas institutions, ESL or ESL-tutoring courses for the 'university of the Third Age', integrated English and tourism programmes of differing lengths for general tourists

wishing to supplement traditional tourist activities with language learning, and integrated specialized courses aimed at professionals or other persons in established positions which enable them to combine 'special purpose' ESL relevant to their vocation with recreational tourism and work-site experience of their vocational interests in Australia (e.g., such a course might focus on the language of banking, provide lectures on banking in Australia, and include visits to banks). It is important, at least in the BCAE programmes, that the language, culture and tourism components are fully integrated, each supporting and complementing the others.

Eighth, Australia has obtained through its immigration programme a huge resource of language skills which tends to be under-utilized. If tourism and other industries are to take maximum benefit from this resource, at least two things are needed: first, that all non-native English speakers have the opportunity to develop both their general English proficiency and their vocational language skills to levels commensurate with their needs. Second, industry training programmes and general educational programmes must make specific provision in order to attract to them non-native speakers with skills in other languages. Such provisions might include pre-sessional English classes, in some cases training programmes conducted in the other language, and any necessary counselling and tutorial support. Most needed of all is acceptance by the industry that such people have special contributions to make and that special provision may be needed to attract them into the industry, to select them, and to ensure they have any pre-requisite English or other skills.

Tourism: Reference has already been made to a number of implications for the tourist industry in discussing educational implications. It has been emphasized that the industry must, as Qantas is doing [see AFMLTA Information Bulletin, No.24, February 1988, pp. 59, 60, 63], accept some responsibility itself by lobbying for educational changes, by encouraging staff to develop language skills, and by itself providing courses (as it did when ATIA co-sponsored the development of an intensive Japanese course in 1986-7 and some elements of the industry released staff to take the course). In addition, however, the tourist industry must recognize that language skills are commercially valuable, they take a long time and much personal effort to develop, and it is reasonable that they be recognized through salary loadings, recruitment preferences, and other incentives in the same way as are other vocational skills. Preferential conditions of this sort for persons with language skills would probably do more than anything else to demonstrate their real vocational value and to encourage many more students to opt for language study as a part of their normal educational programmes.

Where personnel are available with skills in other languages, this should be made obvious to tourists by shop-window stickers, badges worn by staff, publicity material, and any other available means. Indeed, it is in the interest of companies with staff with language skills to make this fact known since they will attract more custom. Wherever possible, notices, public information, street signs, directions, necessary forms (e.g. for Customs and Immigration purposes), and all other information tourists need access to should be presented in the languages of major tourist groups. In some localities (e.g., Fortitude Valley in Brisbane), this is starting to occur even if on a small and insufficient scale but much more is needed if

tourists are to be assisted to overcome the sense of disorientation referred to earlier.

Since the sheer diversity of potential language needs makes it unlikely that even current needs can be satisfied in the immediate future and, in any case, changing patterns of tourism entail changing patterns of language demands, whatever is done to develop language skills amongst tourism employees will need to be supplemented by access to interpreting and translation facilities. Though much has been done in the last fifteen years to improve the provision of interpreters and translators, even Australia's domestic needs are still far from being fully satisfied (cf. Lo Bianco 1987, Chapter II. C.1) and the nation's international needs for interpreters for trade and tourism have scarcely been touched. There is need, therefore, for much more rapid development of a comprehensive interpreter-translator service with more courses, courses to a higher level, and professionalisation of interpreting-translating so that it can become a career for more people. In addition, the role of the Telephone Interpreter Service should be re-defined to enable it (or an analogous service) to assist with tourist needs and the languages offered should include those of all tourist groups (especially the smaller groups less likely to be catered for by industry employees).

Other services already available in the community (e.g., ethnic radio and multicultural television) potentially serve to help to bridge tourists into Australia but they could be more effective in this regard if their roles were defined as including service to the tourist industry. In addition, tourist hotels and other large-scale caterers should consider providing programmes that also serve as bridges for tourists between the two countries and cultures. Thus, news and other information services might be provided both in the languages of the major tourist groups and in 'simple English' over the hotel's internal radio and video channels, perhaps using the services provided by some international chains or the programmes from Radio Australia, ethnic radio and multicultural television. Though the latter suggestion may require amendments to broadcast copyright provisions, it is ironic if publicly funded services should be denied with or without payment to a priority industry that could use them effectively to enhance the attraction of Australia as a tourist venue by bridging the gap between tourists and Australia and by lessening their sense of alienation and disorientation.

Research and Development: Though the field of applied linguistics is sufficiently developed to enable effective courses to be designed to meet the needs of tourism and to identify and respond to other language problems, there are a number of areas pertinent to tourism in which research and development needs are evident. A list of major priorities would include:

- Projected tourism patterns: numbers, source countries, and hence language skills required;

- Needs analysis in the many situations relevant to tourism in Australia in order to identify precisely what languages are required, what skills are required in those languages, and what situations, tasks, functions, syntax, lexis and cultural components should be included in courses;

* Course times required in relation to proficiency levels sought for different course types to different learners in different modes;

* The effect of different course intensities and how to structure highly intensive courses for best results with least adverse stress on learners;

* Measurement of aptitude for different learners entering different courses in different modes (current approaches to aptitude testing are simplistic and heavily conditioned by the audiolingual methodology of the 1950's and early 1960's);

* Syllabus and materials development in the different languages to be taught;

* Course design and teaching methodology for both general and specific purpose, vocational courses;

* The structuring of sequences of courses in different modes: their design, structure, evaluation, and integration;

* Autonomous learning and distance learning (including the use of modern technology in these contexts and to support on-going independent learning on exit from a course);

* Evaluation of all policies and courses.

CONCLUSION: Language skills and cultural understanding have essential roles to play in every aspect of the tourist industry. In the past, Australia has paid scant regard to this role and to the wider role of language skills in promoting international trade. There are signs that such attitudes are changing but the language teaching system has been so debilitated that its recovery will take much effort and probably more time than the expected growth in tourism can allow.

Though the solutions proposed here to the problem of how to penetrate the language frontier in the tourist industry are necessarily incomplete in a paper of this length, they are not easy to implement and will necessitate major changes in attitude amongst many people not only in language teaching but especially in educational administration, tourism and government; in addition, some less-than-adequate steps already commenced will need to be re-considered. Such a task is not easy but the rewards that tourism could bring if the more optimistic forecasts are believed are enormous and could exceed those of any other Australian industry: equally great will be the loss if Australia fails to meet the challenge of tourism. What is certain is that we will fail to meet that challenge if we fail to confront the language and culture issues, i.e., if we ignore the need to understand, communicate with, and accommodate our services to the tourists. In any case, language needs raised by tourism are little different in nature from, and no greater in magnitude than, the needs generated by other areas of the export industry and, in particular, by the immigration programme. In seeking to accommodate the needs of tourism, in seeking to penetrate the language frontier in tourism, the education and training system will also more effectively meet the language needs of the rest of industry and of Australia's linguistically diverse society.

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